



Putter, A. (2020). A Fragment of Boendale's *Melibeus* in England: Manuscript, Text, and Context. *Spiegel Der Letteren*, 62(2), 143-169. <https://doi.org/10.2143/SDL.62.2.3288553>

Peer reviewed version

Link to published version (if available):
[10.2143/SDL.62.2.3288553](https://doi.org/10.2143/SDL.62.2.3288553)

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A fragment of Boendale's *Melibeus* in England: manuscript, text, and context

Introduction¹

In a brief note (Putter 2019a), I reported the discovery of an unnoticed fragment of Jan van Boendale's *Melibeus* in The National Archives at Kew, London. In this article, I give a detailed codicological description of this fragment, reproduce images of it, and provide a full transcription. By comparing the text with that of the other manuscripts of Boendale's *Melibeus*, I then consider the implications of this discovery for future editors of the poem, and I analyse the language of the scribe in order to determine the provenance of this new fragment. Finally, I discuss the history of the fragment and what this can tell us about the reception of Boendale in the Low Countries and beyond.

A brief introduction to the poem and its textual tradition will be helpful at the start. Jan van Boendale (c. 1285-c. 1351), *alias* 'Jan de Clerc', was one of the most prolific Middle Dutch poets.² From 1312 he appears in the records as town clerk of Antwerp (Lucas 1937; Van Oostrom 2013: 144). Amongst his many works are *Brabantsche yeeften*, *Van den derden Eduwaert*, *Der leken spiegel*, and *Dat boec van der wraken*, to mention but a few (Van Anrooij 2002). Although Boendale's authorship of *Melibeus* has been contested (for he does not name himself in the poem), a convincing case that he was indeed its author has been made on the basis of style and content (Reynaert 2002; Kestemont 2013: 160-167). The place and date of composition, given in the epilogue to the poem, are consistent with the attribution to Boendale:

¹ The research presented here forms part of the project 'The Literary Heritage of Anglo-Dutch Relations, c. 1050-1600', funded by the Leverhulme Trust, whose support is gratefully acknowledged. I have had help and advice from many individuals. I would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for constructive suggestions, Bart Besamusca, Daniël Ermens, and Remco Sleiderink for advice on Jan van Boendale's *Melibeus* and codicological issues; Angus Graham for advice on other adaptations of Albertanus of Brescia and for making me aware of the Antwerp incunable; Sjoerd Levelt for pointing me to the Norfolk fragment; Richard Beadle, Erik Kwakkel, Daniel Sawyer, and Ed van der Vlist for guidance on codicological dimensions; Evert van den Berg and Chris de Wulf on the Middle Dutch dialect; Paul Dryburgh, Lora Angelova, and Natalie Brown of the National Archives for advice on the conservation history, for sharing insights based on their multispectral imaging analysis of the fragment, and for providing me with high-quality photographs that made it possible for me to produce a transcription; and finally Femke van der Fraenen, Monika Müller, Thierry Dewin, and Patrik Granholm for supplying me with images of relevant manuscripts and fragments from respectively Universiteitsbibliotheek, Ghent, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Hamburg, Bibliothèque Royale, Brussels, and Kungliga Biblioteket, Stockholm. Finally, I thank The National Archives for permission to reproduce three images of the fragment.

² The dates are debated. I follow Van Oostrom 2013: 144-146.

Dit boec waert met mire pinen
 Ghetracteert uten latine,
 Al t'Antwerpen in die poert
 Int jaer na Gods gheboert
 .XIII^e XL. ende twee,
 Te half aprille, min no mee. (3758-3763)³

(With my efforts, this book was translated out of Latin, in the town of Antwerp, in the year 1340 and two after God's birth, neither more nor less, in the middle of April.)

The prologue likewise tells us the poet lives in Antwerp, and also associates the poem with the patron to whom we know Boendale dedicated other works (Sleiderink 2003: 115-20), Duke Jan III of Brabant: 'Minen lieven here den hertoghe / Van Brabant' (9-10).

Boendale's Latin source, as he also says in the prologue, was Albertanus of Brescia's *Liber consolationis et consilii*, written in 1246. This prose text, in which a husband, Melibeus, is counselled by his wife to remain rational and patient after a violent attack on his home and family, was popular throughout medieval Europe, including the Low Countries (Graham 2000a; Corbellini 2002), and there are adaptations of it in many European vernaculars (Graham 2000b, supplemented by Divizia 2014). Prominent examples are Renaud de Louhans's *Livre de Melibée* (c. 1336), Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee* (c. 1385) and Dirc Potter's *Mellibeus* (c. 1415). Amongst all these, Boendale appears to be unique for being in verse.

Melibeus was edited by F. A. Snellaert (1869) from the Marshall manuscript (Bodleian Library, MS Marshall 29). This carefully executed manuscript has recently been digitised as part of an AHRC-funded project led by Aditi Lahiri. A diplomatic edition of the Middle Dutch texts contained in it, including *Melibeus*, was produced by Johanneke Sytsema (2014), and is also available on-line.⁴

The poem has until now been known to exist in four manuscript witnesses:

1. O: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Marshall 29, s. xiv^{ex}.

³ Citations are from Snellaert 1869, which also offers variant readings of H. The edition was digitised (with some corrections) at https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/snel003nede01_01/, last accessed 16 May 2020. Modern punctuation has been added. All translations are my own. Readers should be aware that Snellaert silently expanded most abbreviations and regularised [v] and [w].

⁴ See <http://dutch.clp.ox.ac.uk/?q=book1>, last accessed 15 April 2019.

2. H: Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Germ. 24, s. xiv^{ex}.
3. B: Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale, MS IV 1284, 5, s. xiv^{med}.
4. G: Ghent, Universiteitsbibliotheek, MS 1607, s. xiv^{ex}.

O and H contain complete copies of the poem; B and G are fragments (consisting of a bifolium and a single folio respectively). *Bibliotheca Neerlandica Manuscripta et Impressa* notes the existence of two excerpts from Boendale's *Melibeus* in Stockholm, Kungliga Biblioteket, MS A91a (cf. Ermens 2015: 165, n. 75), a late fifteenth-century anthology of devotional and mystical treatises (Kuras 2001: 33-35), but this is erroneous.⁵ The first item has the reported title 'Hier beghint een sonderlinck goet troestelijk boecxken' (fol. 145r); the second 'Soe dat ghewarighen troest alleen in gode te socken is' (fol. 261v).⁶ The first title bears a vague resemblance to the one that introduces Boendale's *Melibeus* – 'Hier beghint dat boec van troeste ende van rade dat gheheten es mellibeus' (MS O, fol. 1r)⁷ – but the item it introduces is plainly a devotional prose text and not Boendale's poem. The second title should read 'Hoe dat ghewarighen troest alleen in gode te soeken is'. It is no coincidence that this is also the title of Book III, chapter 16, of the Middle Dutch translation of Thomas à Kempis, *De Imitatione Christi* (De Bruin 1954), for that is indeed the text that follows in the Stockholm manuscript. For our purposes, then, this manuscript can safely be ignored.

Apart from the four manuscripts, there exists an early printed edition of Boendale's *Melibeus*, published in Antwerp by Govaert Bac between 1496 and 1498 (Graham 2000: 915, n. 25).⁸ Only a single copy of this incunable survives: Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, 4 Inc.s.a. 126. The book has been fully digitised.⁹ A comparison of its text with that of the surviving manuscripts shows that it closely follows O, with modernisation of spelling plus a scattering of additional errors that are probably compositorial.¹⁰

The New Fragment

⁵ See *Bibliotheca Neerlandica Manuscripta & Impressa*: <https://bnm-i.huygens.knaw.nl/lexicontermin/LEXI000000003736>, last accessed 27 April 2019.

⁶ The 'reported titles', including the errors of transcription in the second, were presumably taken from Kuras 2001: 33-35.

⁷ In H the same incipit is found (fol. 7v), though not as in O before the table of contents, but rather immediately before the poem itself.

⁸ No. 12748 in *Gesamtkatalog der Wiegendrucke*: <https://gesamtkatalogderwiegendrucke.de/>, last consulted 19 April 2020.

⁹ See <https://daten.digital-sammlungen.de/~db/0003/bsb00035381/images/index.html>.

¹⁰ See, for instance, fol. 6r, 'ongebont' for 'onghedout' (impatience) (O, line 98), fol. 6v, 'eghene' for 'en ghene' (O, line 141); fol. 28r, omission of the rhyme word 'niet' (O, line 1422).

To this list can now be added a fifth manuscript witness, a fragmentary bifolium that I shall refer to as L. L is in The National Archives (TNA) at Kew and bears the reference number E 163/22/2/24. I first encountered it in a catalogue search for items of potential interest for a current research project on the literary heritage of Anglo-Dutch relations in the medieval and Tudor period. It was then described as ‘A poem in Dutch; Inc. ‘Van bonen worde gheghenen’; 2ff. (fragments)’. The manuscript date was given as ‘15th Century’.¹¹ The opening line of the fragment in TNA’s catalogue (‘Of beans be yawned’?) made no sense, and I decided I should examine the fragment *in situ*. When doing so, it soon became obvious that I was looking at the remains of a lost manuscript of Boendale’s *Melibeus*. The first line, which actually begins ‘Van bouen wordt ghegeuen’ (‘is given from above’), corresponds with line 1396 in Snellaert’s edition.¹²

An image of the fragment will illustrate some of its characteristics and peculiarities. Below is fol. 1r – or rather what is left of it today.

Figure 1: E 163/22/2/24, fol. 1r

The manuscript was probably made of calf skin. The width of the folios is c. 205 mm, a standard size. The height of the leaves, in their current form, varies from 99 mm (max) and 60 mm (min); the top margin is c. 12 mm. The width of the written space is c. 145 mm.¹³

The handwriting suggests a date of the early fifteenth century. The script, the work of a single scribe, is the younger form of Gothic cursive, *cursiva recentior*, which did not come into general use until the final quarter of the fourteenth century (Schneider 1999: 62; Derolez 2003: 142). Some of the features that distinguish it from its forerunner, *cursiva antiquior*, are clearly in evidence here. Note especially the single-compartment *a* and the *g*, which, instead of having the earlier ‘8’ shape, is also reduced to a single compartment formed by a firm horizontal stroke. The conspicuous ascender of the *t*, projecting well above the headline (e.g. ‘spreect’, 1ra, line 10), also points to the fifteenth century (Derolez 2003: 151). Ed van der Vlist, curator of manuscripts of the Koninklijke Bibliotheek in The Hague, has suggested to me that a date early in the fifteenth century may be indicated by the *ij* grapheme, where the *j* is barely longer than the preceding *i* (see, for instance, ‘hij’, 1ra, line 12, and ‘ghij’, 1ra, lines

¹¹ <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C4005490>, accessed 15 April 2019. The entry has since been emended on the basis of Putter 2019.

¹² In Sytsema’s diplomatic edition (Sytsema 2014), this is line 1457. The transcription of MS ‘ghegeuen’ as ‘thetheuen’ in Sytsema’s edition is simply a mistake.

¹³ There is no evidence of a ruled frame and no line justification, so what I have given here is the mean.

14 and 15). Because the scribe does actually write <ii> for <ij> on some occasions ('siin', 1ra, line 6; 'siit', 1ra, line 9), it is sometimes difficult to decide whether the digraph should be transcribed as <ij> or <ii>. The treatment of the verse initials, which are set off from the rest of the line and have all been stroked through with red ink, is more common before 1400 than after, but both in manuscripts from England and in ones from the Low Countries the practice continued into the fifteenth century, no doubt in part because some scribes replicated the mise-en-page of earlier exemplars. The same lay-out is seen in, for instance, The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MS 128 E 2 ('Het Haags liederenhandschrift'), usually dated to early fifteenth century, which has a cursive script not unlike that in L.

As the illustration shows, the text has been laid out in two columns. There is no evidence of pricking. I reported in my earlier note that the pages were unruled, but this was probably wrong. Vague outlines of lines seem to be visible, especially the top line, suggesting that pages were ruled with dry point rather than ink. If this is right, the scribe wrote 'above top line'. Over the course of the thirteenth century, scribes generally took to writing 'below top line'. However, if L is an exception to the rule, there are certainly others. N.R. Ker, who first observed the rule, also noted that 'above top line' is not unprecedented in fifteenth-century manuscripts: 'Some scribes may have gone back deliberately to pre-thirteenth-century practice. Others probably were not concerned with tradition and wrote as it pleased them' (Ker 1960: 16).¹⁴ Apart from black ink (made of iron-gall rather than carbon), red ink (made with vermillion) is used for the two-line rubric (see second column) which forms the heading to chapter 17 of *Melibeus* – the only chapter heading preserved in this fragment – and for the large decorated initial *U* that marks the first letter of chapter eighteen: 'Uier dingen des wilt my getruwen' ('Four things, take it from me'). In Snellaert's edition of *Melibeus* this is line 1423: 'Vier dinghen, wilt des ghetruwen'.¹⁵ Paraphs (1va, line 7, 2va, line 12, 2vb, line 8) are also in red, and on a couple of occasions the names of authorities ('Tullius', i.e. Cicero, 1va, line 7, 'Salamon', 2ra, line 4) have been underscored in red ink. The paragraphus sign used in L is a familiar version of the reversed 'P'. It can be seen below in the reproduction of folio 2v (see column b, line 8).

¹⁴ An example of a Middle Dutch manuscript that shows writing 'above top line' is The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek 130 B 21 (c. 1450, from North Holland, a mid-fifteenth-century translation of Froissart by Gerrit Potter van de Loo), digitised at <https://manuscripts.kb.nl/show/manuscript/130+B+21>.

¹⁵ Snellaert reads 'Dier dingen / wilt des ghetruwen', but 'Dier' is a mistranscription of 'Uier'. Decorated initials are easily misread, of course, but in this case the guide letter 'v', written by the O scribe for the benefit of the rubricator, is still visible. Sytsema give the correct reading (line 1484 in her edition).

Figure 2. E 163/22/2/24, fol. 2v

In the historical overview of paragraph symbols by Edwin H. Lewis, this version of the paragraphus corresponds with figure 20, which according to Lewis belongs ‘to the first half of the fifteenth century’ (Lewis 1894: 13).

A peculiarity of the scribe that may help others to identify his hand elsewhere is that he dots the letter *u*. Thus ‘getruwen’ appears in the manuscript with two raised dots on the *u*. Transcribing this as ‘ghetrüwen’ might give the misleading impression that the dots represent the ‘umlaut’ familiar from modern German and from late medieval manuscripts from Germany and also from areas of the Low Countries bordering on Germany, such as ‘Het Haags liederhandschrift’ and ‘Het Berlijnse liederhandschrift’ (Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Germ. fol. 922). In fact, the diacritics in L are purely graphemic, for *u* is dotted regardless of its phonemic value. Compare ‘züllen’, 1rb, line 2; ‘scoüt’, 2va, line 8; ‘aldüs’, 2vb, line 7). This graphemic practice has been observed in contemporary charters from Limburg, where, as argued by Wethlij (1980: 480-2), the diacritics over the *u* may have been used to distinguish vocalic *u* from consonantal *u*. Since in the charters scribes occasionally also dot for *u* where it represents /v/, De Wulf (2019: I, 159) doubts this explanation, and it does not work for L, where consonantal *u* is also dotted, as in ‘ghegheüen’ (1ra, line 1) and gheüen (1ra, line 12). The scribe may simply have used the dots to distinguish [u] from other letters consisting of minims. Schneider (1992: 92) reports the convention of marking *u* when it is adjacent to other minims in fifteenth-century German manuscripts. In L this practice appears to have been extended to *u* regardless of position.

The usual abbreviations are in evidence.¹⁶ A less common abbreviation is the long loop resembling the straight *s*, seen in ‘eertsc’ (fol. 2ra, line 11), representing a final suspension, here probably *-hen*.¹⁷

Since only the tops of the folios are preserved, working out the dimensions of the manuscript they came from is guesswork, not least because, as we shall see, the manuscript folios were probably trimmed when they were recycled to serve as a loose cover or as endleaves for another book. More can be said about the original dimensions by determining

¹⁶ A superscript horizontal bar indicates the omission of *m* or *n* (e.g. *omme*, fol. 2ra, line 15). Final *-n* is frequently abbreviated by means of a backward loop on the preceding *e* (e.g. *zullen*, fol. 1ra, line 5; *inden*, fol. 1ra, line 11). A superscript apostrophe indicates the abbreviation of *r* plus vowel (e.g. *heere*, fol. 1ra, line 7; *ouerspel*, fol. 1vb, line 11; *ghebuere*, fol. 2va, line 4). A swirly line above the *n* of ‘en’ is used to abbreviate the final *-de* of *ende*.

¹⁷ Cf. the identical suspension mark for ‘lerijng^hen’, illustrated by Kienhorst and Kors 2015: 3.d.

how many lines the scribe wrote per column. To arrive at this estimate, we must first examine the text of L and compare it with that of the other manuscripts.

Transcription

Below follows my transcription of L. I have adopted the following conventions. The paragraphus is represented by ¶. Double square brackets are used for text that is either lost or illegible because of damage: [[.....]] signals loss or illegibility of a line or part of a line; [[]] indicates loss of multiple lines. Abbreviations have been expanded, with italics for abbreviated letters. For reasons explained above, diacritics on *u* have not been transcribed. Given the difficulty in some cases of distinguishing between <ii> and <ij> in this particular scribe's handwriting it might have been sensible, and certainly more expedient, to transcribe the digraph consistently as <ij>. However, because the distinction is at times very pronounced (contrast, for example, 'siin', fol. 1ra, line 6, with 'vijndtmen' fol. 1ra, line 13, and 'siin' with the following word 'lijff' at fol. 2rb, line 7), and because the distinction in general is not inconsequential for historians of the language (De Wulf 2019: 158), I have not regularised, while recognising that doing so may impose a clearer distinction than the scribe cared to make. Two numbers are given for lines. To the left is the number of a line in each column; to the right, and in brackets, is the number of the equivalent line in the standard edition by Snellaert, based on O. The rubricated chapter heading, printed in bold, has been included in the left-hand line count. A similar heading is found in O, but in Snellaert's edition headings are supernumerary. So if no number in brackets appears after any line other than the chapter heading, the reader can conclude that O has nothing equivalent.

Fol. 1r, column a

- | | | |
|----|-------------------------------------|--------|
| 1. | Van bouen wordt ghegheuen | (1396) |
| 2. | Vanden [...]ighen vader | (1397) |
| 3. | Dat is [...]t algader | (1398) |
| 4. | Als wij gode roepen an | |
| 5. | Om troist om raet so zullen wij dan | |
| 6. | Wijsljic bidden om siin ghenaden | |
| 7. | Want hii is heere uan gansen rade | |

8. Biddy hem dan dat gherechtich es
 9. Het geschiede v des siit ghewes
 10. Want hij spreect selue wat dat ghij
 11. Den vader bidt inden name van my
 12. Dat sal hij v seker gheuen
 13. Dit vijndtmen voir wair bescreuen
 14. Ja ist dat ghij hem bidt recht
 15. Mer is dat ghij hem bidt onrecht
 16. Seker wilt dit verstaen
 17. Het sal ouer [[.....]]
- [[]]

Fol. 1r, column b

- | | | |
|-----|---------------------------------------|--------|
| 1. | Alle goet werpen toe | (1419) |
| 2. | Wij en zullen niet weten hoe | (1420) |
| 3. | Want hij seit als men dair siet | (1421) |
| 4. | Sonder my en moechdy niet | (1422) |
| 5. | Van wat datmen scuwen sal ende | |
| 6. | vlien in rade | |
| 7. | Uier dingen dies wilt my getruwen | (1423) |
| 8. | Sel elc mensche in rade schuwen | (1424) |
| 9. | Vrechheit ende ghierichede | (1425) |
| 10. | Dronckenschap ende [[....]] | (1426) |
| 11. | Dese vier vroeck ende [[.....]] | (1427) |
| 12. | Sal [[.....]] | (1428) |
| 13. | Ghij en zult in [[.....]] | (1429) |
| 14. | Raet [[.....]] | (1430) |
| 15. | N [[.....]] | (1431) |
- [[]]

Fol. 1v, column a

1. Want gramschap den sin so verblint (1453)
 2. Dat hii die waarheyt niet en kent (1454)
 3. In rade *ende* in allen dinghen
 4. Saltu diinen moet bedwinghen
 5. Dat hij onghestoort sal staen
 6. *Ende* der redenen sijn onderdaen
 7. ¶ Tullius [[.....]] (1455)
 8. Wat [[.....]] gramschappen doet (1456)
 9. [[.....]]edaen int beste (1457)
 10. [[.....]] ghebrec int leste (1458)
 11. [[.....]]
 12. [[.....]]
- [[]]

Fol. 1v, column b

1. Den mensche gheboren in (1483)
 2. Dat is een ghierich sin (1484)
 3. Want hij sorghet nacht *ende* dach (1485)
 4. Hoe hij meer ghewinnen mach (1486)
 5. *Ende* verghetet goids *ende* der maghe (1487)
 6. Dit seker een swaer plaghe (1488)
 7. Sij can verradenisse spreken (1489)
 8. *Ende* ghemeynen orboir breken (1490)
 9. Spreken can sij met vyanden (1491)
 10. *Ende* vrienden werpen in scanden (1492)
 11. Manslacht keefdom *ende* ouerspel (1493)
 12. *Ende* alle arch also wel (1494)
 13. C[[.....]] ghierechede (1495)
 14. T[[....]] het is hair sede (1496)
 15. [[.....]]
- [[]]

Fol. 2r, column a

1. Dat is goids gemeynlike
2. Een philosophe maect ons gewes (2966)
3. Dattet tghelt des vrecx *verdoemenis* es¹⁸ (2967)
4. Salomon sprac in sinen leuen (2968)
5. Heere en wilt my niet gheuen (2969)
6. Te vele armoeden noch rijcheden (2970)
7. Mer houdt my int middel beurden¹⁹ (2971)
8. Heere mellibeus na dat ghij (2972)
9. Nv hebt horen seggen my (2973)
10. Van rijcheiden *ende* van armoeden (2974)
11. *Ende* van gebreke van eertschen goede (2975)
12. So en wilt v dan verheffen niet (2976)
13. Op v rijcheit wats gheschiet (2977)
14. Want quistise in oirlogen (2978)
15. Seker ghij zulter *omme* dogen (2979)
16. *Ende* altois becommert bliuen (2980)
17. [[.....]]
- [[]]

Fol. 2r, column b

1. Is hij rijc so heeft hij echt (2998)
2. Te meerre cost dats sijn recht (2999)
3. *Ende* ist dat doirloghe lange duert (2300)
4. So ist dan seer gheauentuert (2301)
5. Hij en verlieset siin rijchede (2302)
6. *Ende* doirloghe ende lichte bede (2303)
7. *Ende* licht siin lijff dair toe (2304)
8. So heeft hii scade *ende* scande dair toe (2305)
9. *Ende* so hij meerre is van namen (2306)

¹⁸ 'es' is written interlinearly and preceded by a caret mark in the scribe's own hand.

¹⁹ Scribal error for 'beureden' (content)?

10. So mere hem s [[.....]] (2307)
 11. Ende so oic w[[.....]] (2308)
 12. M[[.....]] (2309)
 13. So[[.....]] (2310)
 14. [.....]
 [[]]

Fol. 2v, column a

1. Ende hem des niet en vermidet (3025)
 2. Dat hij onnutte is waerlike (3026)
 3. Voir gode ende op eertrijke (3027)
 4. Want hij maghe ende ghebuere (3028)
 5. Hair leuen maect te suere (3029)
 6. Met vechten *ende* met brande (3030)
 7. Ende mit vernoye *meniger* hande (3031)
 8. Sonder scout tot *meniger* stonde (3032)
 9. God spreect selue mit *sinen* monde (3033)
 10. Salich siin sij die vredelike (3034)
 11. Want [[.....]] hemelryke (3035)
 12. ¶ [[.....]] (3036)²⁰
 [[]]

Fol. 2v, column b

1. Dats om die menschelicheit (3050)
 2. Die aenden strijt gheleit (3051)
 3. Want aen des volcx veelheyt (3052)
 4. Noch mit redeliker wijsheit (3053)
 5. So en mach nyemant bekinnen (3054)
 6. Wie den strijt sal winnen (3055)
 7. Dair om so spreect aldus (3056)
 8. ¶ Iudas machabeus (3057)

²⁰ O has a paragraphus before the same line (3099 in Sytsema's edition).

- | | | |
|-----|-------------------------------------|--------|
| 9. | Die victorye niet en leyt | (3058) |
| 10. | In des volx veelheit | (3059) |
| 11. | Mer vte cracht dat verstaet | (3060) |
| 12. | Die bouen vten hemel gaet | (3061) |
| 13. | Tis gode een cleyn ding sijts vroet | (3062) |
| 14. | Dat hij [[.....]] doet | (3063) |
| 15. | Van [[.....]] | (3064) |
| 16. | David [[.....]] | (3065) |
| 17. | [[.....]] | |
| | [[]] | |

Textual Comparison

A comparison of the text of L and O is revealing on a number of counts. First of all, it is immediately obvious that L contains much material that is not found in O. On fol. 1r of L, fourteen lines are unwitnessed in O. There are another four such lines on fol. 1va, and one further line on fol. 2ra. Are these extra lines scribal or authorial? It is almost certain that they are Boendale's. Stylistically, they show his fingerprint. For instance, the couplet 1ra, 8-9, 'Biddy hem dan dat gherechtich es / Het geschiede v des siit ghewes', makes use of the same rhyme words as 2966-67 (*gewes* : *es*). The use of *e* for *i* (and vice versa *i* for *e*) in certain contexts is typical of Boendale's dialect, as we shall see. The rhymes of 'Dat sal hij v seker gheuen / Dit vijndtmen voir wair bescreuen', are also repeated later on in *Melibeus*: 'Om dat si u raet souden gheuen / Men vint voer waer bescreven' (O 2072-3). The rhyming of *ghij* with *my* (1ra, 10-11) is an expedience typical of Boendale (cf. 2ra, 8-9, O 2972-3), as Reynaert has noted (Reynaert 2002: 134).²¹

Since *Melibeus* is Boendale's translation from Albertanus of Brescia's *Liber consolationis et consilii*, checking whether the additional lines in L have a basis in the original Latin offers another way of determining whether they are authentic or scribal

²¹ Given the uncertainties surrounding the extent of the Boendale canon, it is worth noting that another two lines in this fragment, 'En ghemeynen orboir breken / Spreken can sij met vyanden' (corresponding with O 1490-1491) are echoed in another poem attributed to Boendale, *Dietsche doctrinale*. Cf. ll. 1448-9: 'Ende doet ghemene rechte breken / Ende metten vianden spreken' (Kuijper 1998).

interpolations. On that basis, fol. 1ra, 4-17 should certainly be accepted as Boendale's own, since they follow the Latin source closely. Here is Boendale:

Als wij gode roepen an
 Om troist om raet so zullen wij dan
 Wijslijc bidden om sijn ghenaden
 Want hij is heere uan gansen rade
 Biddy hem dan dat gherechtich es
 Het geschiede v des sijt ghewes
 Want hij spreect selue wat dat ghij
 Den vader bidt inden name van my
 Dat sal hii v seker gheuen

(If we call on God for consolation, for counsel, then we should pray for his mercy wisely, because he is Lord of all counsel. Therefore pray him for what is just, and it will be realised for you, be sure of it, because he himself says: whatever you ask of the Father in my name, that he will certainly give you.

And here is the Latin source (*Liber consolationis*, chapter 11):

In petendo consilium a Domino devotus et sapiens esse debes, ut ei, qui dominus est consilii, postules devote tantummodo quod sit justum vel quod videtur honestum; et si hoc feceris, sine dubio quod volueris a Domino impetrabis. Ait enim Dominus, 'Omnia, quaecumque petieritis a Patre in nomine meo, dabit vobis' [John 16:23]. (Sundby 1873: 31-32).

(When you seek counsel from God you should be pious and wise, so that you piously ask him, who is the lord of counsel, only what is just and seems worthy. And if you do that, you will undoubtedly obtain what you seek from God. For the Lord says: 'All things, whatever you might ask from the Father in my name, he will give you'.)

The four additional lines of L at 1va, 3-6 – 'In rade ende in allen dinghen / Saltu dijnen moet bedwingen / Dat hij onghestoort sal staen / Ende der redenen sijn onderdaen' (In counsel and in all things you must control your temper so that it will be unperturbed and will be subject to reason) – are likewise a close translation of Albertanus (*Liber consolationis*, chapter twelve):

In consiliis itaque et in aliis rebus cohibere debes motus animi et appetitiones
obedientes efficere rationi. (Sundby 1873: 34)

(In counsel and in all other things you must restrain your emotions and make your
desires subject to reason.)

Last but not least, the lines in L that are absent in O have the backing of the other non-fragmentary manuscript of Boendale's *Melibeus*, namely H. Snellaert relegated variants from H to an appendix to his edition (Snellaert 1869, 645-95), but since H and L agree against O on the additional passages, and since these additions in turn go back to Boendale's Latin source, it is clear that H and L did not add lines but rather that O (or a precursor of O) omitted them.

The other two fragments, B and G, confirm the fact that O is an abbreviation (Ermens 2015: 168-70). B, a bifolium, contains lines corresponding with 455-618 (fol. 1) and 619-801 (fol. 2) of O. In this stretch of lines, H has various lines that are not in O: a couplet after 548, a quatrain after 554, another couplet after 590, and six lines after 800. As Daniël Ermens has shown (2015: 169), B not only has these same lines but also contains a further six lines which are neither in H nor in O.²² The fragment G, just a single leaf, contains all lines corresponding with 2245-2374 in O. Again H has additional material here that is absent in O – ten verses after 2261 and twenty after 2269 – and again the H readings are supported by G. In short, what L and the other the fragments are telling us is that future editors of Boendale's *Melibeus* should look to H rather than O as their copy-text for a complete *Melibeus*, using the other witnesses as a basis for further correction and expansion.

Even the scrappy fragment that is L can be useful here. For instance, while H has a corrupt rhyme in the otherwise authentic quatrain that comes after 1454 – 'In rade ende in allen dinghen / Saltu dinen moet bedwinen' (H, fol. 6vb, 22-23), L's rhyme is unerring (*dinghen : bedwinghen*).²³ Likewise, while O 2969 reads 'Dat ghelt een verdoemenes es', and H 'Dat ghelt des vrake verdomenisse is', it is L that helps us get back to what Boendale probably wrote: 'Dat tghelt des vrecx verdoemenis es' ('that money is the miser's damnation').²⁴

²² His line reference for this additional passage in B should be corrected to 1va, 3-8.

²³ Snellaert to his credit conjecturally emended to the L reading.

²⁴ Snellaert's proposed emendation of 'des vrake' (H) to 'des vrecken' is metrically inferior.

Collation with the other manuscripts, including L, also helps with the emendation of O 3048-3061, which is cited below with substantive variants from other manuscripts in brackets:

Die vierde redene es van dien
 Waer om men strijt sal ontsien
 Dats om die misselijcheyt (L: menschelicheit)
 Die ane den strijt gheleyt;
 Want ane des volx willecheyt (L: veelheyt; H plenteit)
 Noch met redeliker wijsheyt
 Sone mach nieman kinnen
 Wie den strijt sal verwinnen.
 Daer om sprac aldus
 Iudas Machabeus:
 Die victorie niet en leyt
 In des volx willecheyt (L: veelheit; H quantiteit)
 Maer uter cracht, dat verstaet,
 Die uten hemel boven gaet.

(The fourth reason why one should avoid war is on account of the unpredictability that war involves. For neither the willingness of the people nor the wisdom of human reason allows one to know who will win the battle. For this reason Judas Maccabeus said as follows: victory is not dependent on the willingness of the people but on the power that comes from heaven above.

The lines in O make superficial sense, and Snellaert did not emend them, but in view of H, which reads ‘plenteit’ for ‘willecheyt’ at 3052 and ‘quantiteit’ for ‘willecheyt’ at 3059, Snellaert did in his glossary, s.v. ‘willecheyt’, raise the possibility that ‘willecheyt’ could be an error for ‘velicheyt, *veelheid*’ (multitude). The original Latin that lies behind these lines (from Albertanus, *Liber consolationis*, chapter 46), confirms this:

Quarta ratione vitandam est bellum, quia varius et dubius est belli eventus, nec *per multitudinem hominum* nec alia ratione visibili potest esse certus; unde Judas Machabaeus dixit: ‘Non in *multitudine* exercitus victoria fit belli, sed de caelo est virtus. (Sundby 1873: 104)

(The fourth reason why war is to be avoided is that the outcome of war is random and uncertain and cannot be determined neither by the multitude of people nor by any other apparent reason. Therefore Judas Macchabeus said: ‘victory in war is not dependent on the size of the army, but power comes from heaven.’)

While L’s ‘menschelicheit’ for O’s ‘misselijcheyt’ is clearly an error, its reading ‘veelheyt’/ ‘veelheit’ casts further doubt on ‘willecheyt’. How should O be emended? Neither L with its *lectio faciliior*, nor H, which comes up with two words (‘plenteit’ and ‘quantiteit’) where the Latin and the other manuscripts have one, is convincing. The best solution, I think, is Snellaert’s suggestion that Boendale wrote the unusual form ‘velicheyt’. The disagreement between the manuscripts in *Melibeus* in this passage and in an earlier one – O 2117, ‘vleesscheyt’ (*sic*); H ‘quantiteit’ – becomes understandable on this hypothesis, as does the manuscript variation in another Boendale poem, *Der leken spiegel*, I, xxxvi, 38, where ‘veelicheyt’ is found in one manuscript and ‘veelheit’ in another (De Vries 1844-1848: 100).

Original Dimensions of L

At this point we can return to the question of the approximate height of the folios of L. Collating the text with H can give us a rough idea of how many lines were in each column. Including chapter headings in our counts, there are in H 39 lines, counting from the line corresponding with ‘Van bouen wordt ghegheuen’ up to the one corresponding with the first line of the next column in L (1rb, ‘Alle goet werpen toe’). Assuming the L-scribe had the same lines to dispose as the H-scribe, we would need to postulate a line count of 39 for fol. 1ra. For 1rb, we would need to postulate 35 lines; for 1va another 35; for 2ra 37 lines; for 2rb 34 lines; and for 2va 33. Of course, these numbers can only be approximations of original line counts. First, the chapter headings create an area of uncertainty. The rubrics of H are sometimes wordier than those of O; H and O give chapter numbers, while L does not; and even where the manuscripts more or less agree on chapter titles, the scribes laid them out differently. Thus L’s one surviving chapter heading (1rb), though similar in wording to that of H, occupies two lines in L but only one in H. Factoring this in would take the estimated line count of that column up to 36. Second, H, too, is unlikely to be complete. For while a comparison of O and H shows that O is much shorter than H (by over 500 lines), H also

dropped or omitted the occasional singleton or couplet,²⁵ though rarely more than that.²⁶ We should expect nothing different from L. These factors probably explain the slight variation in the reconstructed line counts per column, ranging from 33 to 39. My best guess is that L had 36/37 lines per column, fewer than in any of the other manuscripts of *Melibeus* (O: 49 lines; G: 40 lines; B: 49 lines).

The estimated line count makes it possible to gain an impression of the height of these folios before they were damaged. As far as the size of the written area is concerned, the reproduction of fol. 1ra shows 17 lines crammed into a text space that is about 85 mm high; 34 lines would give us 170 mm; three extra lines would take us to c. 185 mm. The original written space would thus have been c. 185 mm x c. 145 mm. To reconstruct the height of the entire leaves we need to include the top margin, c. 12 mm, and factor in an estimated bottom margin. The bottom margin is usually (as in O and H) about twice as large as the top margin. Adding top and bottom margins would give us a total height for the leaves of 221 mm. These dimensions (221 mm? x 205 mm) are not what we would expect to find. The norm of relative dimensions is that the width of the manuscript folio should be ‘about 70 per cent of its height’ (Kwakkel and Thomson 2008: 14). For a leaf that is 205 mm wide, we would thus expect a height of c. 293 mm. The conclusion to which we are driven is that the leaves as they now present themselves to us, with their narrow top margin, are not what they were in the original manuscript. As we shall see below, it is likely that these manuscript leaves were at some point recycled to bind another book or to serve as a loose cover for documents. The dimensions of the leaves as I have been able to reconstruct them supports the hypothesis that they were topped and tailed in the recycling process.

The Dialect of the Scribe

As far as the provenance of the manuscript is concerned, there are clues to be found in the language of the scribe. The original poem would have been in Boendale’s own language, that of Antwerp, with whatever remained of the dialect of his birthplace further south in Brabant (Boendale was born in Tervuren, near Brussels). The language of the manuscripts of *Melibeus* is of course a different matter. We know that H was copied in Utrecht, because the

²⁵ For instance, 1144, 1149-50, 1791, 2398-9.

²⁶ I noticed only three larger-scale omissions in Snellaert’s apparatus: 1337-50, 1509-12 and 1592-1601.

scribe revised a couplet of the original prologue – ‘Al t’Andwerpen daer ic wone / Maecte ic dit boexken scone’ (‘In Antwerp where I live, I made this fine book’, O 41-2) – to tell us so: ‘Tot Utrecht daer ic wone / Screef ic dit ghedichte scone’ (Snellaert 1869: 645). The language of the O-scribe is believed to be consistent with Boendale’s own, and my own analysis below confirms this: like Boendale himself, the O-scribe hailed from Brabant (Sytsema, Grijzenhout and Lahiri 2014).

In localising the language of scribes, it must be borne in mind that many forms may reflect their source rather than their own active repertoire. The method for determining the dialect of the L-scribe must therefore be to compare L and O and to focus on how and why they part company. An analysis along these lines shows that the L-scribe was not from Brabant. First of all, forms in O that are peculiar to Brabant are absent in L. So instead of infinitive ‘selen’ (= Modern Dutch *zullen*) in O 1420, typical of Brabant (Van Loey 1976: 45; map 155/1146 in Van Reenen, Brouwer and Wattel²⁷), L has ‘zullen’. Interestingly, *sal* (O 1424 and also the form of the 1st and 3rd person singular indicative elsewhere in O) appears as ‘sel’ in L (1rb, line 8), a form peculiar to Holland (Van Loey 1976: 45; map 115/1120 in Van Reenen, Brouwer and Wattel²⁸). Disyllabic *ane*, also peculiar to Brabant (Van Reenen and Van den Heuvel 1997; De Wulf 2019, I, 343-4), is routine in O (3051, 3052), but becomes *aen* in L, the usual form in Flanders and the Northern Netherlands. The double comparative *meerder*, a Brabant and Limburg speciality, is also avoided. So where O has ‘Te meerderen cost’ (2009), and ‘so hi meerder es van namen’ (3006), L reads ‘Te meerre cost’ and ‘so hij meerre is van namen’.

A linguistic comparison of O and L is revealing in other ways. One consistent difference is the treatment of long vowels. Compare the following:

²⁷ <https://www.middelnederlands.nl/item/155/1146/?text=selen>.

²⁸ <https://www.middelnederlands.nl/item/155/1120/?text=sel>.

MS O

MS L

daer (1421)	dair
orbore (1490)	orboir
haer (1496)	hair
orloghen (2978)	oirloghen
altoes (2984)	altois
dorloghe (2300)	doirloghe
daertoe (3004)	dair toe
oec (3008)	oic
voer = modern Dutch 'voor' (3027)	voir

As is to be expected with scribes copying poetry (Putter 2019b), L shows more respect for original spellings of words in rhyme position, so we find <ae> and not <ai> in rhyme words (1ra, 15, 1va, 5-6, etc.). The scribe's tendency to impose <ai> and <oi> outside of rhyme constraint is unmistakable, however. These <oi> and <ai> spellings are generally characteristic of the dialect of Holland. The use of <oi> in closed syllables has been carefully mapped by Chris de Wulf (2019, vol. 3, map VII): although sporadically found elsewhere, its heartland is the province that is now South Holland. The L-scribe also imported <oi> in his spelling of 'God': where O has 'gods' (O 1487, O 2968), L reads 'goids'. The charter evidence (pre-1400) associates this with Limburg,²⁹ but literary texts and later medieval documentary evidence suggest that by the early fifteenth-century at least it is to be associated with South Holland as well as Limburg.³⁰

One characteristic of Boendale's rhymes which has already been mentioned is the use of *i* for *e* and conversely *e* for *i* in particular contexts. Thus 'is' typically appears in O as 'es', while *kennen* appears as *kinnen*, the form typical of Southern Brabant (De Wulf 2019, vol. 1, 263-4). This is reflected in rhymes of O, such as *gewes* : *es* (2969-2970) and *verblint* : *kint* (= modern Dutch 'kent', O 1453-1454). The distribution of 'is' and 'es' in local charters reveals a clear dividing line.³¹ Generally, Flanders, Brabant and Zeeland are 'es' lands, while Limburg and the Northern Low Countries are 'is' lands. The L-scribe must have been from the <i> zone. Thus in 1484, where O has 'es', he writes 'is'. And while he is normally

²⁹ https://www.middelnederlands.nl/zoeken/search/?type=simple&prefix=t_lc&text=goids#tab-documents.

³⁰ The attestations in MNW are exclusively from Limburg (4 x) and South Holland (4 x). The literary texts of *CD-ROM Middelnederlands* attest 'goids' only in *Sint Servaes* (Limburg) and poems from Holland (Dirck Potter, *Der minnen loep* and *Van den neghen besten*).

³¹ <https://www.middelnederlands.nl/item/14/70/?text=es+>.

respectful of rhyme words, keeping *ghewes* : *es* (O 2969-70) where H (from Utrecht) imposes *is*, he nodded at 1453-4. Here O has the perfect rhyme, *verblint* : *kint* (1453-4), while L has the imperfect rhyme *verblint* : *kent*.

The variation between *i* and *e* in the preposition ‘met’ requires separate treatment. The general situation in the fourteenth century is that the Southern Low Countries, barring Limburg, had ‘met’ and the North and North-East ‘mit’.³² As one would expect, O consistently has ‘met’. L, on the other hand, fluctuates: ‘met’ occurs on three occasions (once at 149, and twice at 3030) but it is noticeable that L departs from O with ‘mit’ on three other occasions (3031, 3033, 3053).

Some patterns are harder to interpret but are so consistent that they should be reported. In pronouns such as ‘hij’, ‘wij’, O uses <i> or <y> spellings whereas L typically adopts the newer spelling <ij>. Compare ‘hi’ (1421, 1454), ‘Ghy’ (1428) and ‘ghi’ (2981) in O with ‘hij’, ‘Ghij’ and ‘ghij’ in L. In negation, O uses both ‘en’ and ‘ne’ as the negative particle, but L avoids ‘ne’. Compare 2976, ‘Sone wilt u dan verheffen niet’ and 3002, ‘Hine verliest sine rijcheyde’, in O with ‘So en wilt v dan verheffen niet’ and ‘Hij en verlieset sijn rijchede’ in L. In words where modern Dutch has <sch>, O generally has <sc>, while L has <sch>. Compare ‘scuwen’ (1424), ‘Dronckenscap’ (1426), ‘gramscap’ (1426), ‘gramscapen’ (1456), ‘gesciet’ (2977) in O with ‘schuwen’, ‘Dronckenschap’, ‘gramschap’, ‘gramschappen’, ‘geschiet’ in L. The pre-1400 charter evidence shows that the <sch> spellings are generally Eastern (map 108/758 in Van Reenen, Brouwer and Wattel),³³ though by the fifteenth century they must have spread to Holland, because the poems of Willem van Hildegasberch and Dirc Potter – as transmitted in The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek 128 E 6, from Holland, c. 1480) – are full of them. The same is true for L’s form of ‘Maar’. This appears as ‘Maer’ in O (2971, 2060) and in H’s reading for L1ra, 15, but L consistently has ‘Mer’. This is Eastern according to Van Reenen, Brouwer and Wattel (map 68/470³⁴), but fifteenth-century writers from Holland also use it.

In sum, the <oi> and <ai> spellings for long *a* and *o* and the form ‘goids’ point to South Holland. The fluctuation between ‘met’ and ‘mit’ is also seen in South Holland (De Wulf 2019, vol. 1, 281), as is the form ‘sel’ (where Boendale has ‘sal’). There are also some Eastern characteristics (*meer*, ‘mer’ for *maar*, <sch> spellings); but whether this tells us something about the birthplace of the scribe, the provenance of his exemplar, or the spread of

³² <https://www.middelnederlands.nl/item/213/1539/?text=mit>

³³ <https://www.middelnederlands.nl/item/108/758/?text=schade+>.

³⁴ <https://www.middelnederlands.nl/item/68/470/?text=mer+>.

Eastern forms to Holland in the fifteenth century is a thorny question that I must leave to the experts.

History of the Fragment

One final question should be addressed: how did our manuscript end up in the state it is now, as a fragment of a bifolium in The National Archives? As we work backwards from the present to the past, we know less and less. As L's current classmark, E163/22/2/24, indicates, the fragment has come down to us in the records of the Exchequer, and more specifically those of the King's Remembrancer, 'one of the two major Exchequer officials concerned with the accounting and audit procedures and also in the wider administrative functions of the Court of Exchequer from the twelfth century to the nineteenth'.³⁵ The records of the King's Remembrancer contain mostly what one would expect from Exchequer records: memoranda rolls, account books, deeds, and so on. The classmarks E 163, E 164, and E 165 contain miscellaneous items that defy classification. According to TNA's catalogue, E 163 includes, amongst other things, 'manuscript and printed fragments recovered from book bindings and covers'.³⁶ L was presumably a fragment of this kind.

The image of fol.1v-fol. 2r below shows how it was restored.

Figure 3: E 163/22/2/24, fol. 1v-fol. 2r

The vellum fragments have been mounted on modern parchment leaves and sewn into their present guardboards by using the original stitch holes. There is no conservation record for this particular item, but Lora Angelova of TNA was able to find conservation records of comparable items in the series, E 163/22/2/43, 63 and 64, all loose leaves from medieval manuscripts with extensive damage. All were restored in the late 1980s, and it is reasonable to assume L was repaired at the same time.

The story of L's degeneration before it came into the good hands of the Public Record Office, as TNA was called when it was founded in 1838, can be read between the lines of the custodial history of the collection before 1838. From medieval times up to the early nineteenth century, the records of the King's Remembrancer were stored in the office of the

³⁵ Quoted from the online catalogue of The National Archives:
<https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C565>

³⁶ See <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C6608>.

King's Remembrancer, near Westminster Hall. In 1822 they were temporarily moved to Westminster Hall itself, and housed in a 'flimsy erection of deal boards, dark, damp, and almost pestilential'. Three Irish labourers who were asked to pack the pile of records in 1836 were 'sustained by strong stimulants' as they sorted through the 'mass of putrid filth, stench, dirt and decomposition' (Maitland 1893: xiii). A dog was set loose on it to deal with the rats. Anyone handling the fragment today will be pleased to know that the damage to L was probably caused by water, and that L is now free from microbial growth.

L's history before its fragmentation is shrouded in ignorance. The surviving folios presumably once formed the outer leaves of a quire. Since folio 1r begins at O 1396 and folio 2r at O 2968, the standard quire of six bifolia, i.e., twenty-four pages, would provide a perfect fit with the line count I have posited (36/37 lines per column). Possibly the original manuscript was dismembered in the Low Countries and the bifolium used to bind an early printed book that was then imported into England and finally ended up in the Exchequer at Westminster. However, we should not discount the possibility that the Boendale manuscript was in England much earlier and was recycled locally, in London, to make an Exchequer book or to serve as a loose cover for Exchequer documents. Given the early-fifteenth-century dating of the fragment, it is possible that it crossed the North Sea in the company of Jacqueline of Hainault (Jacoba van Beieren), Countess of Holland, Zeeland and Hainault, who sought refuge in England in 1421 and married Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, two years later, before going back to the continent (Vickers 1907: 94-9, 127-128). Alternatively (or subsequently), the manuscript may have belonged to one of the members of the sizable community of Dutch-speaking migrants (Ormrod et al. 2019: 102-110, 113-116) who made their home in medieval London.

An interesting parallel to consider in this context is the fragment of Boendale's *Brabantsche yeesten* that is now in the Norfolk Record Office (NRO, DN/ACT 5/5). Like L, the Norfolk Boendale fragment is a bifolium. In this case, however, we know that the folios were used in the late 1530s as endleaves for a book that was made locally, for the book in question is the Norwich Consistory Court Act Book, 1533-38 (Alban 2014: 105-7).³⁷ The Norfolk fragment has been dated to Boendale's own lifetime (c. 1340), and may have come to England soon after it was made (Alban 2014: 106). Edward III's court had relocated to Antwerp in the late 1330s, and Boendale must have been in frequent contact with the English royal court at that time. The Royal Wardrobe Accounts from July 1338 to February 1400,

³⁷ Alban also reproduces an image of the bifolium.

also in TNA's Exchequer records (E 36/203), mention him twice (Lucas 1937). By whatever route it came to England, the Boendale manuscript of *Brabantsche yeesten* was certainly in Norwich by the late 1530s. The circumstance that explains what a Middle Dutch chronicle was doing in England at that time is that, after London, Norwich had the largest number of Dutch-speaking migrants in England (Ormrod et al. 2019: 103).

Members of these migrant communities were prosperous and numerous enough to leave bequests to the Dutch-speaking guilds they joined (Bolton 1998: 79) and were certainly literate. I hope to shine some light on the written language of a flourishing Dutch community broad in an edition, currently in progress, of the fascinating bilingual English/Dutch statutes of the Dutch Fraternity of St. James (now London, Guildhall Library, MS 15838), written in London in 1501. The books owned by these communities have vanished, but perhaps not without trace: the fragments of Boendale in TNA and the Norfolk Record Office may be their tangible remains.

Conclusion

What are the wider implications of this latest addition to manuscripts of *Melibeus*? First, L is of interest to palaeographers and philologists. It shows scribal dialect translation in action, and has some unusual words and spellings: the scribe's habit of dotting the *u* whether it represents a vowel or a consonant is unusual, and we might also take note of 'quistise', presumably from a noun based on the verb *quisten*, and meaning 'verkwisting'. The word is also in O (2978) and therefore not unique to L, but L confirms that it is a genuine Middle Dutch word that deserves to be in MNW.

Second, for anyone interested in Boendale, L provides further evidence of his popularity, not just locally but also further afield. As Van Oostrom remarks, 'Het compleet en grondig ompspitten van het landschap van de Boendale-receptie staat nog uit, en zou een boeiend beeld kunnen opleveren van toonaangevende Nederlandse teksten in de viertiende eeuw' ('A complete and thorough exploration of Boendale's reception is still lacking, but could offer us a fascinating picture of the rich life of major Dutch texts from the fourteenth-century' (Van Oostrom 2013: 174-175). As far as *Melibeus* manuscripts are concerned, H is from Utrecht, while L was probably written in South Holland. Back in Antwerp, *Melibeus* was printed at the end of the fifteenth century by Govaert Bac. Even in England, Boendale was apparently being read. The Boendale manuscript of *Brabantsche yeesten* that was used to

bind a Norwich book in the 1530s was sourced locally, and L could similarly be the fragment of a book that once belonged to a Dutch-speaking migrant community in England. After the Middle Ages came centuries of neglect. The dismemberment of Boendale manuscripts to make covers for other books is part of that story, as is the damage that L endured in the early nineteenth century.

Snellaert's edition and the more recent diplomatic edition of the Marshall manuscript have put Boendale's *Melibeus* back in the public domain, but anyone reading the text in these editions should be aware that they are reading an abbreviated version. Even though not many lines of L survive, nineteen of them are missing in O. Yet they are almost certainly authorial, in Boendale's style and based on his Latin source. They are also confirmed by H, which has yet more lines still that are absent in O, and again the authenticity of these additions is vouched for by the other manuscript fragments, G and B. The abbreviation of *Melibeus* in O could be authorial, of course, but since at least one of the omissions in O resulted in an orphaned verse (1519) this seems doubtful. Medieval poets certainly produced different versions of their works, and Boendale himself issued multiple versions of some of his poems (Stein 1990; Van Oostrom 2013: 143, 151), but they cared about rhyme and would not have deleted passages if it wrecked a couplet. A new critical edition of Boendale's *Melibeus*, which is badly needed, should be based on H, but the fragments matter and can help us, as L shows, to restore authorial readings.

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